

TV's 'Romper Room' Is the 'World's Largest Kindergarten'

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By BILL STROBEL

Anyone who rides herd on a half dozen pre-school kids on a daily, 60-minute, live television show lives dangerously.

And Nancy Besst, who is better known to "the world's largest kindergarten class" as "Miss Nancy" of KTVU's Romper Room, has had her moments.

It's not the kids. She can usually handle them even when their innocent young minds conjure up questions such as "Miss Nancy, do you have bones in your tummy?" and ask them when she is delivering a commercial.

KIDS ARE EASY

The kids, she can handle. But the animals she is frequently called upon to introduce to her young audiences are something else again.

The boa constrictor especially. It was delivered to the studio one day by an animal handler who informed her shortly before air time that he was unable to stay for the show.

Miss Nancy, who has learned a lot after dealing with 4 and 5-year-olds for several years, takes care of emergencies as they arise.

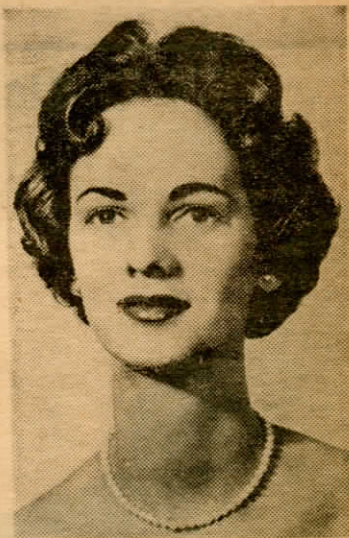
She handled this one by asking the floor manager to take care of the snake.

CAMERA IMAGE

She did it for two reasons. Primarily because snakes aren't her favorite pets and when she is on camera it is not a good idea to let her young audiences know that "Miss Nancy" is afraid of snakes.

The floor manager took care of it. When the show went on the air, he dropped the boa in her lap.

"There was nothing I could do," she said, "but sit there



NANCY BESST
No time for snakes

and hope that the children couldn't see how terrified I was. I had to say something, so I said, 'Oh! Isn't this a pretty design?' And everytime I said anything the snake spit at me. This was bad enough but everytime it spit, it wiggled and fell on the

floor and I had to reach down and pick it up."

She has also had her troubles with a mynah bird who is a gifted conversationalist.

The bird's name was Rajah and he performed so well during the program that Miss Nancy asked him if he had any last words for the boys and girls before they went off the air.

As it turned out, Rajah did. "Just give me one more martini," he said.

Nancy is used to getting responses like this from the kids but never from a bird.

INNOCENT MISS

There was the time for instance she asked an innocent looking four-year-old miss what her favorite game was.

"Spin the bottle," said the

'MISS NANCY'--KTVU'S POPULAR KINDERGARTEN

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doll without batting an eyelash.

As part of the daily Romper Room routine, the kids gallop around the studio on imaginary trips to places like department stores and airports and after the trip has ended, Miss Nancy asks them what they saw on the junkets.

She should have known bet-

ter than to ask on the day they took an imaginary gallop through the service station. But she did ask and all six of them told her.

Sometimes even Miss Nancy goofs. There was the time, for instance, that she was trying to demonstrate a medicinal spray for scratches and burns.

"I pushed the button and

the spray didn't seem to come out the way it should but I kept right on pushing it until I heard a small voice say 'Miss Nancy, you are getting me all wet.' "

The spray was coming out all right — one of her prize pupils had been completely drenched with it.

Miss Nancy, who in real life is Mrs. Wayne Henley,

does not hold a teacher's credential even though she reaches more children in a day than most teachers will reach in a lifetime.

Romper Room is syndicated to more than 100 cities throughout the United States, Canada and Puerto Rico.

Each city has its own "Miss Nancy" but the format for the program is carefully tailored